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“ORDINARY NORTH-CAROLINESE,”  
OR  
“I HAD RATHER STAY THAN TO GO WITH YOU”

In *Studies in English Syntax*, written during my stay at the University of North Carolina, I had occasion to say of a certain idiom: “It has not, however, entirely fallen into disuse. It may be heard in ‘I had rather stay than *to go with you*’ and similar sentences.” The point to be observed in this sentence is that “*to*” is, of course, omitted before “*stay*” but emerges before “*go*.” In a review of *Studies in English Syntax*, published in *Englische Studien*, XXXVII, 217-220, Mr. C. T. Onions, author of *An Advanced English Syntax* and an active member of the staff of the Oxford English Dictionary, fell foul of my illustrative sentence and declared: “Such a sentence is possibly ordinary North-Carolinian, but it is not English.”

Mr. Onions, it will be observed, not only denies that “I had rather stay than *to go with you*” is good English but affirms with the utmost assurance that it is not English at all. As the idiom is Shakesperean and has not hitherto been listed in works on syntax, the following citations arranged alphabetically are submitted with the view not merely of vindicating what Mr. Onions is pleased to call “ordinary North-Carolinian” but of illustrating once more how unwise and how perilous it is even for a worker on the great Oxford English Dictionary to be unduly dogmatic or wantonly cocksure about a subject as difficult and as delicate as English syntax:

Bible: “I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than *to dwell* in the tents of wickedness forever.” (*Psalms* 84:10. No change is made in the Revised Version of 1884.)

*The Boy and the Mantle:*

“I had rather be in a wood,  
Under a greene tree,  
Then in King Arthur’s court  
Shamed *for to be*.”

(This is ballad No. 29 in Child’s *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* and follows the Percy MS.)

Bryan, Wm. J.: “I would rather have my name go down in history as a man who fought for clean politics than *to have* it registered on the roll of Presidents” (*Washington Herald*, April 10, 1911. “He added,” continues the *Herald*, “that many parsons would rather

keep silent on a certain subject than *to* run the risk of losing their pulpits").

Burke, Edmund: "I deceive myself indeed most grossly if I had not much rather pass the remainder of my life hidden in the recesses of the deepest obscurity . . . than *to* be placed on the most splendid throne of the universe, tantalized with a denial of the practice of all which can make the greatest situation any other than the greatest curse" (*Speech at the Guildhall*, Bristol, Sept. 6, 1780).

Cable, Geo. W.: "Seems to me as if some of these old Creoles would liever live in a crawfish hole than *to* have a neighbor" (*Jeanah Poquelin*).

Caxton: "Rather he wold have deyed than *to* have falsed his feyth ayenst her" (*Blanchardyn* c. 1489, 122, 16).

Collier, Price: "The sailors and the stokers would rather obey captain and officers, however they may have been chosen for them, than *to* be sunk at sea" (*Germany and the Germans*, 1913, p. 425).

Cotton, Charles: "There is not a man amongst them who had not rather be killed and eaten than so much as *to* open his mouth" (*Translation of Montaigne's Essays*, 1700, p. 137).

Dodd, Wm. E.: "Most thoughtful men would rather have written Rhodes' *History of the American Civil War* than *to* have been the president for life of the American steel trust" (*South Atlantic Quarterly*, April 1913, p. 119).

*Gismond of Salerne*: "Rather I will consent unto my death than so *to* spend my dayes in pining woe" (1567, II, 2, 50).

Goldsmith, Oliver: "Caesar was heard to say that he had rather die once by treason than *to* live continually in apprehension of it" (*Roman History*, 1769).

Grady, Henry W.: "I had rather see my people render back this question rightly solved than *to* see them gather all the spoils over which faction has contended since Catiline conspired and Caesar fought" (*The Race Problem in the South*, delivered in Boston, Dec. 13, 1889).

Hall, Bishop Joseph: "The Israelites had better have wanted their quailes than *to* have eaten them with such sauce" (*Works*, ed. 1648, p. 45).

Harris, Joel Chandler: "Why, grandmother said she'd rather count the hairs on a tarrypin's back than *to* bother about the small things in a story" (*Uncle Remus and the Little Boy*, 1910, p. 53).

Henry, O.: "I'd better have gone back to Sleepy-town and died in a wild orgy of currant wine and buns than *to* have had this happen" (*The Head-Hunter*).

Ingersoll, Robert J.: "And I said, I would rather have been a poor French peasant, and gone down to the tongueless silence of the dreamless dust, than *to* have been that imperial impersonation of force and murder known as Napoleon the Great" (*On Napoleon*). "But he [Rutherford B. Hayes] did say this: 'I would go into this war if I knew I would be killed in the course of it rather than *to* live through it and *to* take no part in it'" (*The Situation*, delivered in Chicago, Oct. 21, 1876).

Jefferson, Thomas: "I had rather keep our New England associates for that purpose than *to* see our bickerings transferred to others" (*Letter to John Taylor*, June 1798).

Jones, Rev. Sam P.: "I would rather have an old woman give me a pill and pray over it than *to* have a doctor who is an agnostic" (Geo. R. Stuart's *Famous Stories of Sam P. Jones*, 1908, p. 198).

Jonson, Ben: "No, I would rather she were of none then *to* be put to the trouble of it" (*The Silent Woman*, 1609, V. 3, 139).

Lee, Gerald Stanley: "I would rather have a few inferences on hand that I can live with every day than *to* have this one huge, voracious inference (the scientist's) which swallows all the others up" (*The Lost Art of Reading*, 1902, p. 107).

Lichefield, Nicholas: "I had rather die than *to* tarrie upon the same" (*The First Booke of the Historie*, etc., 1582, fol. 40 v.).

Lincoln, Abraham: "I would rather be defeated with this expression in the speech, and have it held up and discussed before the people, than *to* be victorious without it" (*Divided House Speech*, April 17, 1858).

*Melusine*: "Rather I wold dey than *to* suffre and see my peopple so murdryd" (c. 1500, 202, 22).

More, Sir Thomas: "They had rather let all their enemies scape than *to* follow them out of array" (*Utopia*, tr. by Robinson, II, 10).

Rolfe, W. J.: "If he [the young student] is incapable of thus making out the story as he goes along, he had better be sent back to the Lamb's *Tales*, which he probably read in his childhood, rather than *to* have a dry epitome of the plot as an introduction to the play when he has become old enough to study it" (*New York Times Saturday Review*, April 23, 1910, p. 229).

Sewall, Samuel: "I told her I had rather go to the Stone-House adjoining to her, than *to* come to her against her mind" (*Diary*, Oct. 12, 1718).

Shakespeare:

"Brutus had rather be a villager  
Than *to* repute himself a son of Rome."  
(*Julius Cæsar*, 1, 2, 172.)

"By heaven, I had rather coin my heart,  
And drop my blood for drachmas, than *to* wring  
From the hard hands of peasants their vile trash."  
(*Julius Cæsar*, 4, 3, 72.)

Smiles, Samuel: "Hume was accustomed to say that he would rather possess a cheerful disposition than with a gloomy mind *to* be the master of an estate of ten thousand a year" (*Self-Help*, cap. XII).

Stevenson, Robert Louis: "I would liever go with you to prison than *to* go free without you" (*The Black Arrow*, Davos Press ed., III, p. 49).

Tourgee, Albion W.: "I would go there sooner than *to* betray those who have trusted their lives and honor with me" (*A Fool's Errand*, 1879, p. 266).

Udall, Nicholas: "I will rather have my cote twentie times swinged, Than . . . not *to* be avenged" (*Ralph Roister Doister*, 1553, p. 38).

Washington, George: "I had rather you would provide claret . . . than *to* use my Madeira" (Owen Wister's *Seven Ages of Washington*, 1907, p. 7).

Whittier, J. G.: "I would rather see the sunset light streaming through the valley of the Merrimac than *to* look out for many months upon brick walls" (Leon H. Vincent's *American Literary Masters*, 1906, p. 260).

Wiley, Dr. Harvey W.: "I would rather do without fish at this season of the year than *to* eat that which had been kept in cold storage" (*The Outlook*, N. Y., April 12, 1913, p. 826).

Winship, Dr. A. E.: "Today I visited the Fair and would rather learn what I learned from three pigs out there than *to* know all that is in any book that you can read." (*The Morning News*, Dallas, Tex., Oct. 26, 1915).

Withers, Rev. Philip: "I had rather oppose prejudices than *to* contend against facts" (*Aristarchus*, ed. 1822, p. 197).

Wolfe, Gen. James: "I would rather be the author of that poem [Gray's *Elegy*] than *to have the glory of beating the French to-morrow*" (D. H. Montgomery's *Leading Facts of English History*, 1887, p. 320).

Worth, Nicholas: "I had rather publicly confess an error of youth than *to do another man injustice* (*The Southerner*, 1909, p. 263).

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